

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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P R 242100Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7549

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

USSOUTHCOM

AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA

AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 9779

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, PFOR, TSPA, PINS, CO

SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. THE LIBERAL PARTY REACHED AGREEMENT WHICH SHOULD REDUCE THE PARTY'S CHARACTERISTIC DIVISIVENESS. THE CONTINUING SOCIAL SECURITY DOCTORS' STRIKE CAUSED, IN ADDITION TO OTHER HARDSHIPS, A TEMPORARY PROHIBITION OF LIQUOR SALES IN BOGOTA. THE COLOMBIAN THEORY OF OUTER SPACE SOVEREIGNTY HAS SURFACED IN THE FORM OF A DISPUTE WITH BRAZIL, WHICH IN TURN CAUSED THE GOC TO DECLINE THE OFFER OF A US AIDSAT DEMONSTRATION. THE EDUCATION MINISTER LENT SUPPORT TO CHARGES OF POLICE BRUTALITY DURING STUDENT VIOLENCE. THE REPORTED APPOINTMENT OF FINANCE MINISTER BOTERO AS AMBASSADOR TO THE US WAS DENIED BUT SOURCES CLAIMED GOVERNMENT MINISTER REYES HAD BEEN OFFERED THE POSITION. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY INDICATED THAT IT WOULD SUPPORT US MULTILATERAL POSITIONS ON TAIWAN/INTELSAT AND ISRAEL/UNESCO. END SUMMARY.

2. LIBERAL PARTY REACHES UNITY AGREEMENT. THE LIBERAL PARTY ACHIEVED AGREEMENT ON "RULES OF THE GAME" BY WHICH THE PARTY

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WILL SELECT ITS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE FOR 1978 AND WHICH

SHOULD MINIMIZE THE SELF-DESTRUCTIVE IN-FIGHTING WHICH HAS
PLAGUED THE PARTY ALMOST SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE LOPEZ
ADMINISTRATION (BOGOTA 9480). REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FOUR
IDENTIFIABLE PARTY FACTIONS SIGNED THE AGREEMENT ON SEPTEMBER
21 IN THE PRESENCE OF PRESIDENT LOPEZ, AS GUARANTOR. ON THE
FOLLOWING DAY IT WAS RATIFIED BY AN EXTRAORDINARY CONVENTION
COMPRISING VIRGUALLY ALL OF THE PARTY'S CONGRESSMEN. THE
ACCORD CALLS FOR A) SEPARATE CONGRESSIONAL AND PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION IN 1978, FEBRUARY 12 AND JUNE 4, RESPECTIVELY, AND
B) PROVIDES FOR THE NOMINATION, BY A PARTY CONVENTION FOLLOWING
THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS, OF THE CANDIDATE WHOSE SLATE
WINS THE GREATER NUMBER OF CONGRESSIONAL SEATS.

3. DOCTORS' STRIKE ELUDES SOLUTION. THE SOCIAL SECURITY DOCTORS'
STRIKE (BOGOTA 9480) WHICH APPEARED CLOSE TO SOLUTION AT MID-WEEK
WORSENER AGAIN WHEN GOVERNMENT-UNION NEGOTIATIONS BROKE DOWN.
THE DURATION OF THE STRIKE (TWO WEEKS) AND THE BREAK-DOWN OF
NEGOTIATIONS HAVE SPLIT MEDICAL RANKS. SOME PRIVATE PRACTITIONERS
CLOSED OR THREATENED TO CLOSE THEIR OFFICES IN SOLIDARITY. AT
THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, THE MEDICAL ASSOCIATIONS OF
ANTIOQUIA AND SANTANDER DEPARTMENTS INDICATED A DESIRE
TO PULL OUT OF THE STRIKE. EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE IS
AVAILABLE AT NON-SOCIAL SECURITY HOSPITALS BUT CROWDING
IS A PROBLEM. TO HELP ALLEVIATE THE CRUNCH, BOGOTA'S
MAYOR BANNED LIQUOR SALES FOR FIVE DAYS LAST WEEK AND
TRAFFIC AND OTHER INJURIES WERE SUBSTANTIALLY REDUCED.

4. COLOMBIAN "SOVEREIGNTY" IN OUTER SPACE. AN OFFER BY
THE USG TO DEMONSTRATE THE PEACEFUL USES OF SATELLITES RAN
AFoul OF THE COLOMBIAN CONCEPT OF ITS SOVEREIGNTY OVER OUTER
SPACE, COMPOUNDED BY A COLOMBIAN-BRAZILIAN CONTROVERSY OVER
THE PLANNED LOCATION OF A BRAZILIAN GEOSYNCHRONIC SATELLITE
IN COLOMBIAN "SOVEREIGN SPACE". THE OFFER WAS DECLINED, WE
LEARNED INFORMALLY FROM THE FONOFF, BECAUSE COLOMBIAN TELECOM
PERSONNEL ARE ENGAGED INTENSIVELY IN PREPARING AN ITU INITIATIVE
WHICH IS DESIGNED TO WHWART THE BRAZILIAN PLAN (BOGOTA 9703).
IN THE NOTE DECLINING THE US OFFER, THE GOC TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY
TO STATE THAT IT HAD NO OBJECTION TO THE OVERPASSAGE OF THE US
SATELLITE, ALTHOUGH WE HAD NOT REQUESTED SUCH PERMISSION, AN
APPARENT ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH A PRECEDENT TO SUPPORT COLOMBIA'S
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SOVEREIGNTY CONCEPT. THE EMBASSY HAS FILED A DEMURRAL
WITH THE FONOFF AND IS AWAITING INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE
DEPARTMENT (BOGOTA 9735).

5. EDUCATION MINISTER CRITICIZES POLICE ACTION IN UNIVERSITY
VIOLENCE. MINISTER OF EDUCATION DURAN DUSSAN PUBLICLY
CRITICIZED POLICE HANDLING OF THE VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS
THE PRECEEDING WEEK AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY (BOGOTA 9480).

DURAN STATED THAT ONLY A SMALL MINORITY OF THE STUDENTS, PROVOKED BY OUTSIDE AGITATORS, HAD PARTICIPATED IN THE DEMONSTRATIONS. HE SAID THE POLICE "INVASION" OF THE UNIVERSITY GROUNDS HAD AGGRAVATED THE SITUATION AND ADDED THAT HE WOULD HAVE OPPOSED THE OCCUPATION IF HIS MINISTRY HAD BEEN CONSULTED. BY HIS COMMENTS, DURAN SEEMED TO ALLY HIMSELF WITH THOSE STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS WHO CLAIMED THAT SOME POLICE ACTED WITH UNNECESSARY BRUTALITY DURING THE CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATORS.

6. REPORTED APPOINTMENT OF FINANCE MINISTER BOTERO AS AMBASSADOR TO US FENIED. FINANCE MINISTER BOTERO'S APPARENTLY FACETIOUS STATEMENT TO REPORTERS THAT HE WAS AMBASSADOR-DESIGANTE TO THE US (BOHOA 74UL WAS DENIED BY THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE. THE DENIAL PROBABLY DISAPPOINTED CRITICIS OF THE GOC'S ECONOMIC POLICIES AS WELL AS SOME OF ITS SUPPORTERS, WHO BELIEVE THAT BOTERO HAS FAILED TO DEFEND OR EXPLAIN ADEQUATELY THE POLICIES FOR WHICH HE IS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE. KNOWLEDGEABLE EMBASSY SOURCES HAVE, HOWEVER, TOLD US THAT THE AMBASSADORSHIP HAS BEEN OFFERED TO OUTGOING MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT CORNELIO REYES, WHO REPORTEDLY HAS NOT YET DECIDED WHETHER TO ACCEPT.

MULTILATERAL. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY INFORMED THE EMBASSY THAT THE GOC WOULD SUPPORT THE US POSITION ON TAIWAN'S ACCESS TO INTELSAT (BOHOTA 9722) AND ON ISRAEL'S INCUSION IN THE UNESCO EUROPEAN REGION (BOGOTA 9692).
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